

# Repentance

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The crowd of people Peter had been talking to were stunned by what they had just learned. Speaking under inspiration, Peter had convinced them that they were guilty of the murder of Jesus Christ. Only weeks before, a bloodthirsty mob had demanded that Pontius Pilate, the Governor of Judea, would execute the innocent Jesus on false charges fabricated by the religious establishment. Apparently, many in Peter's audience had been a part of that unruly mob, or had shared their desire for Jesus to be executed. They now felt the weight of guilt for their actions and their attitudes and they didn't know what to do in an effort to deal with their sin.

Perhaps you have experienced this same state of mind at some point in your life. You have perceived that you have fallen short of the mark; that your actions and motives have been wrong; that you have done harm and caused hurt to others. You feel the need to make amends in some way, but you don't know how. The remedy for us today is the same on Peter prescribed for his first century audience. Lets read Peter's admonition in the second chapter of Acts:

Acts 2:36 NRSV Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's prescription for dealing with sins is still correct in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. When we want to deal with our past, with our sins, the first thing we must do is repent. "Repent" is a religious term, and we need to know what it means. To repent is to change one's mind and purpose. The first step in dealing with our sins, when we have come to recognize them, is to decide to make a change. We resolve to change the direction of our lives. The change involves living in conformance to God's law; living with a desire not to break it any longer. It is a departure from actions and thoughts that the Bible classifies as "sin". The book of First John defines for us what sin is:

1JO 3:4 Whosoever commits sin transgress also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law (KJV paraphrased).

Repentance is a pivotal point in a person's life. It is literally a "turn-around" in thoughts and behavior patterns. It is the juncture in life when one desires to stop transgressing God's law. Jesus began early in His ministry to teach that repentance was required to enter God's kingdom:

Mat 4:17 NRSV From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

The Bible tell us that God leads us to repentance.

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Rom 2:4 NRSV Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

When God begins to work with us as individuals, He does it by leading us into the process of repentance. This is the method He uses to call us into His family. If you are experiencing a desire to connect with and be reconciled to God, to live within the boundaries of His law, to be clean from past sins, God could be calling you.

The repentance that God is looking for has qualities that distinguish it from false repentance or temporary remorse. The apostle, Paul, had brought about this true repentance in the Corinthian church by writing a strongly-worded corrective letter.

2 Cor 7:8-10 NRSV For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). 9 Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

Paul points out that true repentance can be an emotionally vexing process for us, but that in the end, it helps to produce salvation. There is another kind of repentance, however, that doesn't have lasting results. It doesn't motivate us to enact permanent changes and its final result for the would-be Christian is not eternal life in the Kingdom of God, but death instead. Christians need to be sure that their repentance doesn't stop with the emotional component. They must follow-through with actions that produce permanent change in their lives. Paul goes on to describe the kinds of changes that true repentance produces in the lives of Christians:

2Cor 7:11 NRSV For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment [vindication]! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter.

The components of Godly repentance are a desire to be cleared; a desire to be vindicated of sin; indignation at the sin itself, that has brought us into its bondage. True repentance causes us to be alarmed by the consequences of sin, that is, death. It creates a longing for righteousness and a zeal to change and improve our character and behavior.

One of the kings of ancient Judah, Josiah, is a perfect example of Godly repentance. He became king when he was just a boy of eight years, but he had a desire to serve and obey God from the beginning of his reign (2Ki 22:2). When Josiah was eighteen, a

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copy of the book of the law was found in the temple. The Bible had been lost for generations and the commands of God were unknown to the priests, the King and the nation.

The priests read the book to Josiah. When Josiah heard the word of God, he learned that his people had greatly departed from God's instructions and expectations. Josiah's reaction is instructive to those who desire repentance.

2Ki 22:11 NRSV When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. 12 Then the king commanded the priest Hilki'ah, Ahi'kam son of Sha'phan, Ach'bor son of Micai'ah, Sha'phan the secretary, and the king's servant Asai'ah, saying, 13 "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

The act of tearing one's clothes was an expression of remorse and grief. Josiah was *grief-stricken* over the fate of the nation for their sins in transgressing the word of God. He was *alarmed* on behalf of his people because of the punishment that God had decreed on a sinful people such as they had become, after centuries of living contrary to God's laws.

Josiah *cleared* his nation of idolatry and sin. He did this with the *zeal*, *earnest desire* and *vehemence* that Paul was describing to the Corinthians. It is instructive to read about Josiah's example and his repentance. The accounts can be found beginning in Second Kings chapter 22 and Second Chronicles 34.

Christian repentance needs to be as sincere and complete as Josiah's. We must recognize our sin, we must acknowledge it and we have to put it out of our lives. We must resolve to change our motives and behaviors. When we have come to this place in our lives, we can feel that we are not up to the task. We may feel alienated from God as well. We perceive the need to be reconciled to God and to be empowered to overcome sin.

When we have truly repented, we need to remember what Peter exhorted his listeners to do after repentance. He told them to be baptized that they might be forgiven and receive the gift of the holy spirit. The next article in this series will discuss the Christian ritual of baptism and its symbolic importance in the life of the Christian. After that, we will explore the fantastic gift of the holy spirit, the power source God gives to his children to help them overcome their sins.